Espace Art actuel

Salvation : Colm MacCool and Peter McFarlane

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The problem with a lot of politically, environmentally, or socially focused art is that it takes itself too damn seriously, as if the issues it speaks to with such earnest fervour are beyond the purview of humour. The work of two Ontario-based artists is evidence otherwise, and while it may not be groundbreaking stuff they proffer, its humour (tending toward the black) and satiric edge (tending toward the gentle) are a welcome relief from the often overly shrill voice that can typify art of political/social and/or environmental bents, and so constitutes a meaningful contribution to their discourses in and of themselves. Sculptural works by Colm MacCool and Peter McFarlane have been given a curatorial locale by Virginia Eichhorn for the exhibition Salvation, co-organized and toured by The Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, and the Art Gallery of Peterborough.

Now, beyond the aforementioned factors, there is little that overtly connects, here, the work of MacCool and McFarlane. For Salvation, the former contributed objects of a sculpturally representational inclination, while the latter presented sculptural wall reliefs and a series of miniature landscapes constructed from the detritus and waste of consumer technology, constructed from the detritus and waste of consumer technology, while it may not be groundbreaking work, one which we can safely assume honours both the artist's father and his passion while personalizing one of the more common pastimes through which we experience something even remotely resembling the natural world.

Elsewhere, however, McFarlane's work exhibits a decidedly satiric edge, taking dead aim on consumerism and our consequent devas tation of the world. In My Dead Printer Factory (2004), he's taken two computer printers and, with their plastic cases, interior electronics, printer cartridges and various sundry other parts, cleverly constructed a set piece — a scale model — of a factory. The plastic shells of the devices easily adapt in conveying the spare utilitarian architecture of factory buildings, and a number of printed circuit boards, all painted the same bland shade of grey, do double duty in replicating in miniature the elaborate and labyrinthine layout of such industrial complexes. McFarlane goes so far as to remove individual microchips from the very guts of the printers, paint them different colours, and use them here to represent automobiles parked in the plant lot. Witty stuff, and wholly lacking in the self-congratulatory satisfaction and smugness that mars the work of far too many artists working in the same vein. That can be said, too, of Colm MacCool's art, and while neither he nor Peter McFarlane may be at the cutting edge of things, this is work not so easily dismissed.

Salvation: Colm McCool and Peter McFarlane
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario
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